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WITH THE ARMIES OF FRANCE

WAR POEMS

BY

WILLIAM CARY SANGER, JR.

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WILLIAM CARY SANGER, Jr.

AUTHOR OF "TIDES OF COMMERCE," "THE CITY OF TOIL AND DREAMS," "IN THE LAND OF THE HARVEST"

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With the Armies of France

Armies of France, advance,
Forward the line of blue,
From the Alps away to the channel sea
Into the battle to make men free,
Forward, again, to Victory;
Hail, Armies of France!

1916. Written in the Field in France.

REVEILLE

Dawn—on the fields of Flanders.
Dawn—on the plains of France,
A bugle call and a rampart wall
And a day of sword and lance.

Bayonet, blood and slaughter,
Guns that pound and pound,
Prayer and groan and tortured moan
In the roar of the battle's sound.

Dawn—on the fields of Flanders,
Dawn—on the Marne and the Aisne,
Free from strife—new homes and life
Gladden the waking plain.

1916. Written at Plattsburg Military Training Camp.

THE GIFT OF THE WARRIORS[1]

To you we now bequeath that peace
Which was not ours to know,
Freedom, security—release
From dangers of the foe.
The foreign ranks shall not again
Burnt cities trample under,
Nor shall the hosts across the plain
Sweep with their steel and thunder.

To you we give that needed rest
Which was not ours to find;
Each night you sleep serenely—blest—
At peace in heart and mind.
No longer shall the dull red glow
Flare in the smoke-dimmed heaven,
Whose flaming cloud-belts weirdly show
Where countless hosts have striven.

[1] From *The City of Toil and Dreams* by the same author.

And unto you we give that fame
Which was not ours to share,
The glory of a sculptor's name,
A writer's words of prayer.
For we had dreamed our glorious dreams,
Each in his field of knowing,
But we laid them by—for war's dull gleams,
The hope of our life foregoing.

To you we give those hours of love
That we so early lost,
For war had called on us to prove
Our faith—whate'er the cost.
The joys of home and fireside:
A woman's soft caresses
And children's laughter—merry-eyed,
The love that cheers and blesses.

And unto you the dawn we give
Which is not ours to see,
To you and yours the right to live,
In thought and action—free.
To you we give the morning light
On lake and hillside streaming,
And flashing on the city's height
With colors bright and gleaming.

For you the freedom and the life—
For us an unknown grave
After an agony of strife
That others we might save.
Yet we rejoice that in our pain,
Our sacrifice and sorrow,
We may bequeath to you our gain—
The everlasting Morrow.

January, 1916.

VERDUN

Hail, Verdun, rock of immortal France,
Thy crested forts against the sullen sky
Stand, through the tumult of the foe's advance
That thunders at thy gates with savage cry,
For with the legions of an empire's might
The enemy has crossed the border lands
And through the storm of this world-making fight
Surges about thee with unnumbered bands.
Again, again they come with shell and steel
To storm thee, and to crush thy ramparts down
And trample over France with iron heel,
Burning and devastating field and town.
Yet, day by day, we see thy grim forts stand.
All hail, Verdun, defender of the land!

Composed at Verdun, France, January, 1917.

FOR THOSE WHO DIED IN FRANCE

For those who died in France
By cannon-shell and lance,
Forget not, friend, to pray
That they be truly blest
In their eternal rest
So far away.

When here the moonlight dim,
Through forest branch and limb
Shall sift in checkered-silver patterns fair,
The moonbeams also dance,
In forest groves of France,
And touch the little silent crosses there.

And when the sunlight rays
Shall melt the dawn's dim haze
And call you to your day of Harvest reaping,
Remember, all is still,
For them, on plain and hill:
They who are sleeping.

For you the sunlit hours
Of happiness and flowers
And music of the dance;
Yet at the close of day
Forget not then to pray,
For those who died in France.

Written November, 1916, just before the author sailed for France.

CHRISTMAS EVE

Sunset, the cannonade is dying down,
And one by one the quiet stars appear.
The moonbeams silver fort and field and town
And trace the quiet trenches far and near.
From somewhere in a town back of the lines
A chapel bell is calling in the night,
And high above the hilltop crowned with pines
The evening star is shining calm and bright.
It is as though the Angels of the Blest
Had brought the tired army hosts release,
A little pause, and time for needed rest
And thoughts of home and love and heaven's
peace.
"Good tidings of great joy" for all tonight,
In heaven all is peaceful, all is bright.

Composed in the Field in France, Christmas Eve, 1916.

WHEN SUNSET COMES

When sunset comes, and through each western
portal
The rose-light streams through corridors and
halls
To cheer the hospital, and each poor mortal
Within its walls.

How gladly then we turn our tired faces
To watch the golden windows of the west,
Whose streaming light on wall and corner traces
Visions of rest!

Slowly the sunset fades, the shadows lengthen,
And one by one we watch the stars appear;
The quiet evening seems our hopes to strengthen,
Our hearts to cheer.

For in the stillness of the moonlit hours
Refreshing sleep shall come to one and all;
Our prisoned souls will find again their powers
At heaven's call.

So we shall dream, and all our cares will vanish,
And we shall find our youth and health again,
And every fear our happiness shall banish,
And every pain.

With hearts as light as children we shall waken
And wonder why so long they kept us here,
We who have never even once forsaken
Those we hold dear.

So each of us will leave his cot, and turning
Steal to the door, and tiptoe down the hall,
Where here and there a light is dimly burning
Against the wall.

Then down the big hall stairway to the landing,
And past the drowsy porter at the door,
Soon on the moonlit street we shall be standing,
And free once more.

Then through the paths of memory and gladness,
Each to our special happiness and rest,
Forgotten, then, the shadows and the sadness
Where all is blest.

Some to our childhood days, where summer flowers
Border the trout stream sparkling through the field
And leading to the woods, where dreamy hours
Their pleasures yield.

And some to find the cottage of our childhood,
There by the orchard and the farming land,
Close to the field that borders on the wildwood
So near at hand.

With tears of love our father and our mother
Welcome us home, as in the days long past,
Brother and sister run to meet their brother
Returned at last.

And some of us to find our heart's desire:
The maiden of our dreams with laughing eyes,
Welcoming us with love's immortal fire,
Our dearest prize.

And some to where the mountain ranges tower,
And some will turn to greet the glorious sea,
And each will live through every golden hour
Immortal, free.

So each takes up again his life's endeavor,
Statesman and lawyer, doctor, engineer,
Moulding our dreams of faith to last forever
Afar and near.

Slowly the shadows fade; the dawn, advancing,
Will bid us to retrace our steps again,
Away from fields of youthful dreams entrancing
Back to our pain.

Back in the dawn to where the open portal
Takes us again to suffer through the day
Each in his cot, a prisoner and mortal
In human clay.

So in the hospital, through daylight hours
Sufferers all, we lie in silence there,
Striving with pain that almost overpowers
Our strength to bear.

Till once again the sunset hours returning
Bring us our rest, and all our cares release,
With joy we see the evening lanterns burning,
Beacons of peace.

For sleep will come again with all its glory,
The stars again their quiet watch will keep;
Forgotten, then, life's battle-tarnished story
When we shall sleep.

No longer will the bayonets be gleaming,
And hushed will be the tumult of the drums,
Youthful and free our hearts will turn to dreaming
When sunset comes.

Written in the Field in France, 1917, while in the American Ambulance Field Service.

IT IS THE YOUNG WHO MUST ATONE

It is the young who must atone,
Surely the statesmen might have known,
They who plotted a conquest far,
And plunged the nations into war;
Heedless then of the people's voice,
Deaf to all but a ruler's choice,
Bending low to a gilded crown
And a foolish prince's leering frown;
Surely the statesmen might have known:
It is the young who must atone.

Upon the heights of a great gray town,
Over the harbor looking down
There stands a house and a terrace fair
With vines and lilacs drowsing there.
A little child once used to play
About the garden—in the day,
And in the night his dreams would be
Of the harbor and the glorious sea.
By day, from the western window panes
He watched the busy boats and trains;

The line of docks at the waterside
And the giant ships on the restless tide.
Beyond the river, buildings high
Towered into the pale blue sky.
Spanning the gap from ridge to ridge
There loomed a great suspension bridge,
And so before the child there lay
The harbor and the sunlit bay,
Some day, when I'm grown up, thought he,
I'll paint the city beside the sea.

The child grew up to youth's estate
There by the nation's deep-sea gate,
And day by day he learned to draw
And paint the spirit of what he saw.
To watch the harbor night and day
That was his work, his rest and play,
And all her changing scenes he knew
Day in and out, the whole year through.

At times the summer sunlight gave
Its burnished gold to every wave,
And flashed on city walls and spires
And windows with a thousand fires.
He watched the gorgeous sunset skies

Bright with a million destinies,
Flaming in rose and golden hue
Upon the buildings there in view.

He knew the winter days—so cold
That everything seemed gray and old,
And days of drifting snowflakes white,
That veiled the harbor boats from sight,
Or when the sea-fog, low and gray
Veiled the boats on the sullen bay,
And rising from the mist on high
The city's towers sought the sky.

If in the day 'twas fair to see,
What of the moonlit majesty:
The silver rays of slanting light,
The shadows deep, the calm of night,
Myriad stars in the sky aglow,
Lights of boats on the waves below,
Moving, yellow and red and green,
Like an enchanted Venice scene!

High in the west the moon so bright,
Silvered the bay with a path of light,
And now and then across this track
Of light would pass a shadow black,
The silhouette of a moving boat,

A steamer, or a long car-float,
Couriers they who never sleep
Bearing the trade of the mystic deep.

The youth grew up to man's estate.
No longer now was he to wait
And watch the toiling harbor vast,
Now he would paint the scenes at last:
The busy hours of morning light,
The magic hours of moonlit night.

Up in his western study, there
Were placed five canvases, all bare
And new, beside the window panes
Where he could watch the boats and trains.

These were to be his paintings five
Showing the harbor, tense alive:
A dawn in spring, a summer day,
An autumn sunset on the bay,
A cold gray winter afternoon,
And last of all—a night in June,
The harbor, and the stars, and moon,
His masterpiece.

Far away they spoke the word,
Statesmen had decreed it:

War—the cannon now is heard,
Millions march to feed it;
Millions in the prime of life
Down to slaughter going,
Torn and butchered in the strife,
Red—blood—flowing.

War,
Discordant,
Grim, relentless,
Sweeping aside the monuments
Whose walls were reared
By centuries of consecrated labor.
War—blind destroyer of a countless host of men
Whose youthful lives gave such abundant promise
Of glorious fulfillment:
Architects, painters, sculptors, writers, inventors, statesmen,
Men whose lives, had they been spared,
Would have ennobled and enriched humanity,
And would have made this world
An infinitely better place in which to dwell;
Lives who would have given their contributions glorious
To science and to art.

Sad at heart,
Perplexed and troubled,
The young man followed duty's call
And joined the army,
Leaving his work, his hope, his happiness;
His five unpainted canvases
Waiting the touch of the Master hand
Whose magic brush should make them glow
With life and immortality.
For he had dreamed to show to all
The spirit of the harbor, and its glory,
The soul of all its ships, the wondrous story
Of its love and hope and striving—
That was to be his mission,
His sacred contribution, his message to the world.

The training of the army soon began:
Weary months of drilling,
And then, he and a host of others
Set foot upon the soldier-crowded deck
Of an army transport moored to a pier
Along the harbor water front;
His harbor,
The harbor of his youth and hopes and dreams.

At last the hour of departure came,
The hawsers were cast loose,
And—almost imperceptibly at first—
The ship began to move.
The deep-toned blast of the steamer's whistle
echoed along the docks
As she slowly backed out into the river
And turned her bow to the sea.

Along the harbor water front, the transport
steamed,
Then down the lower bay
Till she had passed the Narrows
And was out to sea.

What of the young man and his dreams?
Later his name was on a list
Reported: "Killed in action."

How still and mystic is the night!
Perhaps it is a night when troubled spirits walk
abroad
And seek to cross the silent veil
Back to their life on earth again.
How sad and kindly are the stars!

How wistfully the moon looks down
Over the harbor and the town!

Is it the window-curtain swaying
As though the drowsy breeze were playing
So languidly about the room
Where shafts of moonlight pierce the gloom?
Is it a figure standing there
Before those five unpainted canvases,
Those canvases, so new, so bare,
So dumbly eloquent
Of that which might have been?
The ghostly form now seems to move
And going to the windows of the west
Looks out upon the harbor.
It is a night in June
And through the drifting clouds on high
The silver summer moon
Shines in the sky.
Sadly the figure turns his gaze
From one great canvas to another
Helplessly, imploringly.

Is it the window-curtain swaying
As though the drowsy breeze were playing

So languidly about the room
Where shafts of moonlight pierce the gloom?
Is there a figure slowly leaving,
Troubled in spirit, sadly grieving?
Or is it just the moonbeam's light
Upon the swaying curtains white,
There in the stillness of the night?

It is the young who must atone,
Surely the statesmen might have known,
They who plotted a conquest far,
And plunged the nations into war;
Heedless then of the people's voice,
Deaf to all but a ruler's choice,
Bending low to a gilded crown
And a foolish prince's leering frown.
Surely the statesmen might have known
It is the young who must atone.

Written in the Field in France, May, 1917, while in the American Ambulance Field Service.

TAPS

Rest in sleep—rest in sleep, soldiers of glory,
All is now hushed on the battle-strewn plain.
Millions hereafter shall learn of your story,
You, who have tasted the chalice of pain.

You who have given your life and its gladness,
All that you were and were hoping to be,
Know that from out of the stillness and sadness,
Life shall awaken eternal and free.

Over the battle-field, fortress and byway
Where you so lately have given your all,
Sunlight and flowers shall gladden the highway,
Roses and vines shall encircle the wall.

Take then the rest that to you is now given,
Sadly the Harvest moon shines in the skies,
Sleep—and the stars will be sentries in heaven,
Till the great Reveille bids you arise.

1916. Written at Plattsburg Military Training Camp.

Additional War Poems
1918

FORWARD MARCH
(U. S. Army)

Forward march—across the plain
Now the bugle calls again,
There beneath the darkening sky
See our armies tramping by.

England, France and Italy,
Allies for world liberty,
Now our soldier ranks extend
To the far horizon's end.

Forward march—we're on our way
To the battle-lines today,
Hear the steady tramp and beat
Of the countless, moving feet.

On to victory in France
Now our army hosts advance,
Freedom's call shall make us strong,
And although the war is long,
This shall ever be our song:
"Forward march."

1918.

IN THE YEARS OF THE WAR

Under what troubled skies your steps have led
you,
Through what unquiet regions dark and drear;
Along what shell-torn heights,
Through dim, weird days and nights
Where death was near.

1918.

A SOLDIER'S THOUGHTS AT SUNSET

Sing me my favorite songs tonight:
The songs of love and the moon's fair light.

Songs of a terrace and lawns and trees
And the fragrant, scarcely stirring breeze
That drifts across the enchanted hills
And all the air with magic fills;
Songs of the dances and rhythmic play
Of the gliding forms to the music's lay;
And sing me a dreamy summer tune
Of a balustrade, and the light of the moon,
And the restful view of the valley there
With its tranquil lake, so still and fair,
Reflecting the myriad stars on high
That twinkle and shine in the warm night sky.
Sing of the lawns where the couples walk
Between the dances—when they talk
And laugh as they wander to and fro
Where the Japanese lanterns softly glow
And the old, old story—ever new
Is whispered there and tokens true

Of love's immortal light are given
The fire and tenderness of heaven;
Making the lawns and gardens seem
Like an enchanted midnight dream
Touched with the silver slanting rays
That light the walks and woodland ways
And sifting down between the leaves,
In the drowsy, scarcely stirring breeze,
Trace their magic all around
In varied patterns on the ground.
How subtly fragrant are the hours,
How witching are the music's powers.

Sing to me then the enchanted lays
Of the walks and lawns and the woodland ways:
The songs of love and the moon's fair light,
Sing me my favorite songs tonight.

1918.

A NIGHT IN THE FUTURE

How quiet is the sea tonight,
It is as though forgetfulness and rest
Had come upon the deep
After the long and troubled years of war.
No longer now the submarine
Prowls in the dimness
Watching for its prey.
No longer the destroyers race to strike
The darkened forms of giant battleships and fleets moving across the waters—
Tonight these are but distant memories.
The thunder of the guns no longer shakes the startled coast-line,
And the concussion and the tumult of the cannonade
Have long since died away.
Tonight the far and peaceful stars look down from heaven upon the sea;
One or two lanterns along the coast-line shine sleepily,

And far out upon the waters are the lights of a
ship moving along its course.
How restful and how quiet is the night,
How drowsy is the shore line
Where the ground-swell washes lazily upon the
pebbles and the sand.

1918.

FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD

America, this is thy gift and contribution to the
world
In these dark days
When tyranny and might
Strive to enslave the earth.
First: to the aid of thy hard-pressed but still
undaunted Allies,
Fighting for truth and liberty,
Thou dost send
Thine armies—
Millions of thy sons
To stem the tyrant's tide
And at the last
To drive his savage hordes
Back to the land from whence they came,
And win for liberty and righteousness
The lasting and immortal victory.
And to the far and troubled seas
About the coast of France and England,
Also to other distant waters,
Thou dost send

Thy navy—
To guard the ocean-trails
And with the aid of thy courageous Allies
Sweep from the waves
The lurking submarine
And keep the tyrant's battle-fleets
Locked in their inner harbors.
But of thy gifts, America, greatest is this:
The high idealism of thy world democracy,
Unswerving in thy search and struggle for
The great completion of thy liberal aims:
Freedom and truth and world-wide brotherhood,
Right above might,
Love above hate,
Justice to every nation great and small.
Thy lofty singleness of purpose
Shall from the earth
Banish the evils which have laid their heavy
hands of torment
On the world for centuries.
Hail to thee, America;
All hail to thee, Republic of the West,
God guide thee in the hour of battle
And in the years of peace
Which are to come.

1918.

SLEEP AND FORGET

(In Memory of the Soldiers who died during the War)

Sleep and forget, sleep and forget,
After the pain and the tortured endeavor;
Dim to the westward the sun has now set,
Dream of the stars and your loved ones forever.
See the new moon coming up o'er the plain,
Casting its silver light over the lane,
Over the village and over the hall,
Over the field and the cottage wall;
Fragrant now is the sleep of night
Under the silver starry light.

1918.

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